

The Sir Denis Mahon Foundation

A Review of the first decade

April 2021



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1 A decade of the Foundation

This review for the decade is a tribute to the Foundation's ten years of charitable work in memory of the late world renowned scholar and philanthropist, Sir Denis Mahon.

Sir Denis was a distinguished collector and scholar of Italian art who had a particular interest in drawing, carving and conservation. The Foundation was established in 1988, but only became active following Sir Denis's death in April 2011. Over the past ten years, the Foundation has been exceptionally active thanks to the dedication and hard work of the Trustees, the Artistic Director, the collaborators, artists and young scholars. The Foundation has strived to honour Sir Denis's legacy by promoting the education and accessibility of art and art history, and supporting the development of young artists. It has funded numerous exhibitions, provided grants and prizes to young scholars and artists, funded the Student Art Pass and made significant donations of funding and artwork to museums across the world.

The Foundation now has a website (www.denismahonfoundation.com) and social media presence to keep Sir Denis's legacy alive and to engage with young scholars, artists and supporters.

Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/The-Sir-Denis-Mahon-Foundation-105780621129805/>

Instagram

<https://www.instagram.com/sirdenismahonfoundation/>

Twitter

https://twitter.com/sir_denis_mahon

YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC9fo0uCOaaqFGZevZLCcQTg/videos>

2 Grants and prizes

The Foundation is committed to honouring artistic potential in areas that were of interest to Sir Denis during his lifetime. Over the past decade, the Foundation has established a number of prizes and grants to support and celebrate the work of young scholars, artists and students.

The Sir Denis Mahon Essay Prize

The Sir Denis Mahon Essay Prize was created to celebrate the research and literary work of young scholars who, like Sir Denis, are passionate about art from the Seicento (17th century). The prize was established in 2010 by Sir Denis Mahon's friends and colleagues in honour of his 100th birthday.



The annual prize of £2,000 is awarded to an essay of distinction which reflects Sir Denis's interest in Baroque, Renaissance art and, in particular, the work of Guercino, Carracci, Caravaggio and Nicholas Poussin. More recently the genre has been widened to include modern artists who were either alive at the time of Sir Denis, or were championed by him, and also conceptual contemporary artists, a genre he admired. Each year, the winning essay is presented at a prestigious British or European institution.

For example in 2019, the winning essay on the French painter Jean-Antoine Watteau was presented as a lecture to an invited audience at the National Gallery in London.

The Sir Denis Mahon Award

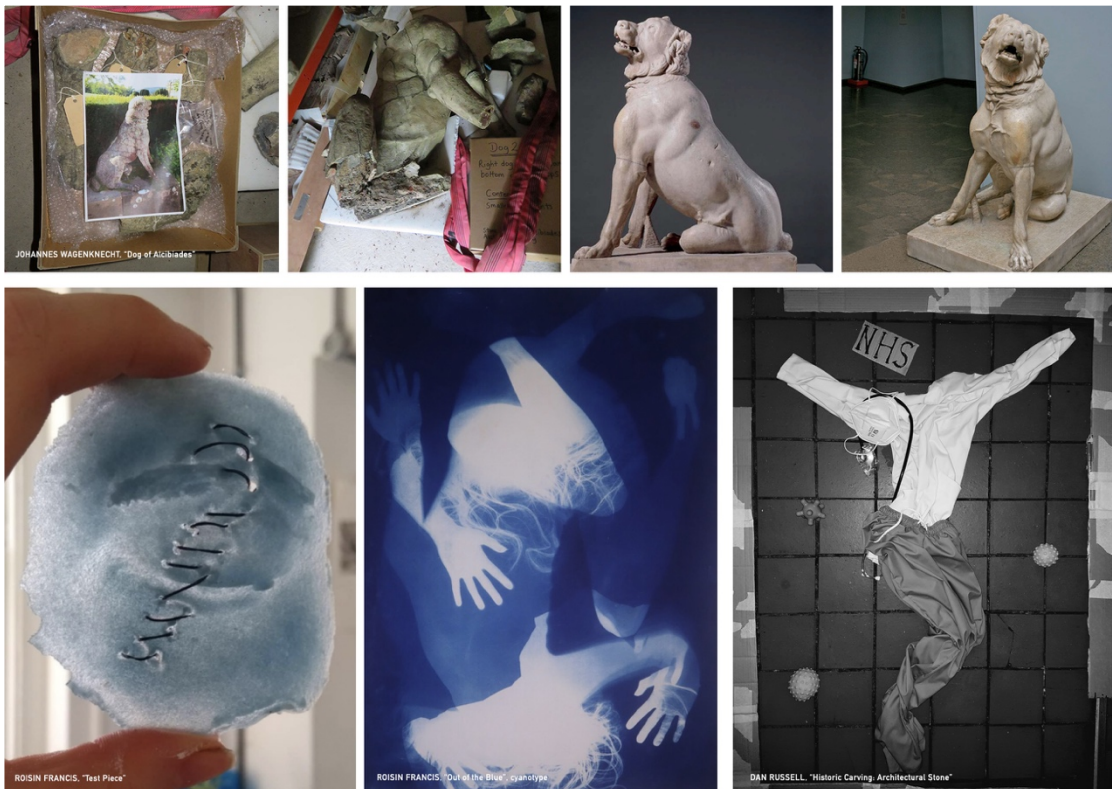
In memory of Sir Denis's passion for painting and drawing, and in recognition of his lifelong support of the Royal Drawing School, the Foundation created an annual award to recognise a promising outgoing graduate of The Drawing Year postgraduate course. Each year, the winner of the award receives £10,000 to put towards a solo exhibition and a studio space for the duration of the year.



The Sculptural Grant

To encourage work on ambitious sculptural projects and support students of the City & Guilds of London Art School, the Foundation established a £5,000 annual grant in Sir Denis's memory. Each year, the grant is put towards a Conservation, Carving and Fine Art student's final year sculpture.

In 2020, the first grant was shared between three successful candidates. The first will create three works in glass exploring the themes of human perception and the fragility of the human body. The second will examine, document and conserve an early concrete garden sculpture the *Dog of Alcibiades* (1834), currently at Chatsworth House. The third will carve a life-size abstract figure in stone, focusing on drapery, inspired by and depicting the personal protection equipment of the NHS to draw parallels with the religious symbolism found in the paintings of the Baroque.



The University of Oxford Development Award

In 2020, the Foundation established a new development award to fund the tuition fees for a future undergraduate student's MA in History of Art at the University of Oxford, Sir Denis's alma mater.

3 The National Gallery of Ireland

The Foundation has provided the National Gallery of Ireland (the “**NGI**”) with invaluable support and substantial funding over the past decade. After Sir Denis passed away in 2011, the NGI received Sir Denis’s entire library, archive and personal papers, in addition to several paintings, including Guercino’s *Jacob Blessing the Sons of Joseph* (c. 1620). More recently, the Foundation funded the appointment of a new archivist and made a formal commitment to funding the Library and Archive Project so that the collection can be fully digitally catalogued.



The Foundation is committed to making art more accessible to everyone and is currently in the process of fully digitising the contents of the archive with the aim of making the material freely available online. The books and documentation represent nearly a century of research and scholarship, particularly in the area of Italian Baroque art, and have greatly enhanced the research resources relating to European art available in Ireland.

4 The Art Fund and the Student Art Pass

Sir Denis joined the Art Fund as a schoolboy in 1926 and remained a member, close supporter and loyal advocate until his death in 2011. Sir Denis bequeathed his collection of Italian Baroque art to the Art Fund, with a request that the pieces be placed on display in specific locations across the country in perpetuity.

The Foundation has made significant donations to the Art Fund to help create the Student Art Pass, which has provided students across the UK with free or reduced-price access to hundreds of exhibitions, museums and galleries. Sir Denis was a strong believer in making art accessible to young people from all backgrounds and the Foundation is proud to have been involved in creating the Student Art Pass.

More information about specific donations to the NGI is in section 6 below.

5 Spotlight on recent exhibitions organised and funded by the Foundation



- *Time and Eternal Life*, Cromwell Place (October – December 2020). This exhibition, featuring Antiquities, and works by Alberto Burri, John Latham, Emily Young and contemporary artists, was held in collaboration with the Royal Museums in Turin, Fondazione Palazzo Albizzini Collezione Burri, Flat Time House, and the kind support of Robilant + Voena, Lisson Gallery and Bowman Sculpture.

It spanned two galleries and five millennia and explored the concept of time and eternal life from antiquity to the modern era. Recorded lectures by professors of theoretical physics at Imperial College widened the outreach and scope of the exhibition, exploring the concept of time in science.



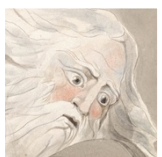
- *William Blake at Flat Time House* (January – March 2020). This exhibition at Flat Time House, Peckham was jointly organised by Flat Time House and The Sir Denis Mahon Foundation in celebration of William Blake's connection with the local area. Flat Time House hosted events attended by William Blake scholars and artists, and the Foundation funded the publishing of a journal documenting research on William Blake.



- *The Power and the Virtue: Guido Reni's 'Death of Lucretia'*, Bowes Museum (2019 – 2020). This was the first UK exhibition outside London dedicated to Guido Reni. The exhibition aimed to show the *Death of Lucretia* 'in conversation' with Reni's other paintings of heroines to create a dialogue around female virtue in his work.

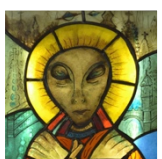


- *Visionaries and the Art of Performance*, Festival of Two Worlds, Spoleto (June – July 2019). The Foundation staged this exhibition, which received worldwide acclaim, at the Festival of Two Worlds in Spoleto, Italy. It contained works by Ulay, John Latham and William Blake. Sir Denis Mahon knew and admired the Festival's founder, the librettist and composer, Giancarlo Menotti (1911-2007), and shared his love for Opera.



- *Visions and Visionaries*, Guildhall Art Gallery (December 2018 – April 2019). This exhibition featured prints by William Blake in dialogue with pre-Raphaelite artists, together with modern and contemporary artists from the Association Age of Future. The exhibition summarised and highlighted some of the figures that defined the "Visionary" idea in art – artists who laid the foundations

for a later, avant-garde generation that drew from these works, inspired to find new forms in their art and poetry.

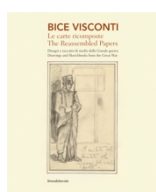


- *Techno Medioevo: Age of Future Reloaded*, Museum of the Order of St John (March – June 2018). This exhibition aimed to propose a new medieval imagination through alternative history and historical re-enactments. The response of the contemporary artists behind Age of Future to a historic, contemporary, and futuristic influence, added a further dimension to the place of technology

in museums, which by their very nature are often focused primarily on the past. Additionally, the Foundation hosted an intensive study day on 14 June 2018 entitled “*The Language and Meaning of Time in Art and Science*”, which focused on the entanglement of art and science throughout history. The study day included talks and lectures from historians, theoretical physicists and artists.



- *Caravaggio: Fashion and Fabrics*, Museum of the Order of St John (October 2016 – January 2017). This exhibition put a spotlight on the fabrics used during Caravaggio's time, with a focus on Caravaggio's painting, *The Cardsharps* (1594), which was loaned to the museum by the Foundation. It also provided the opportunity to view ancient textiles and religious vestments from the Diocese of Novara's and from Rubelli Museum's collections.



- *Bice Visconti: The Reassembled Papers: Drawings and Sketchbooks from the Great War* London, Millbank, London (October - November 2017). The exhibition was held during the events in remembrance of the Great War and presented part of the graphic corpus of works by the artist Bice Visconti (1883 –1962) who enrolled as a volunteer in the Italian Red Cross in 1915, working in a field hospital where she recorded moments in the lives of soldiers and medical personnel.



- *Irish Landscapes* by Luke Dillon-Mahon, 12 Star Gallery, European Commission in the UK, London (18 - 27 February 2015). The Trustees of The Sir Denis Mahon Foundation were delighted to support this exhibition of the artist Luke Dillon-Mahon (1917-1997) in memory of Sir Denis Mahon and in support of the British Friends of the National Gallery of Ireland. Sir Denis loved Ireland and was a frequent visitor to County Mayo and County Galway, where his family originated. His interest for landscapes (the subject of this Exhibition) and his great passion for the “Vedutisti” (landscape painters) such as Francesco Guardi was well-known.

In the same year, The Sir Denis Mahon Foundation helped the Ashmolean Museum and The Art Fund to acquire an important “*Veduta*” by Guardi: “*The Fondamenta Nuove in Venice with the Lagoon and the Island of St Michael*” painted in 1758.



The Foundation has consistently supported exhibitions and events organised by museums and senior scholars in the UK and abroad. Amongst such initiatives were the Caravaggeschi exhibition in 2013 and the Baroque exhibition in 2015 both held at the Diocese of Novara; a Guercino exhibition in Tokyo in 2015 held at the National Museum of Western Art; a Guercino exhibition and Lecture in Piacenza in 2017 attended by senior scholars on the occasion of the restoration of the Guercino masterpiece ceiling at the Cathedral of Piacenza; the Biennale Drawings in Rimini in 2018 and the exhibition *Guercino e il suo Falsario*.

In addition, the Foundation has sponsored publications and illustrated scholarly catalogues for each exhibition it has either organised or co-sponsored.

6 Some of the Donations and sponsorships over the decade

2011/12

Donations totalling £1,745 to the following recipients:

- Gainsborough's House Society;
- the Art Fund;
- Tate;

2012/13

- A donation of Eur 60.000 to the Pinacoteca di Cento following the earthquakes in northern Italy in 2012.
- Donations totalling £2,645 to the following recipients:
 - Gainsborough's House Society;
 - the Art Fund;
 - Tate;
- Provided £10,000 annual funding for a prize at the Prince's Drawing School.

2013/14

- Donations totalling £96,770 to the following recipients:
 - the Art Fund;
 - the Ashmolean Museum to contribute to the purchase of a Guardi;
 - Cento Italy Appeal;
 - Diocese of Novara to support the Caravaggeschi, a Novara exhibition; and
 - University of Kent to fund Tom Henry's book translation of Luca Signorelli
- Commitment to providing £360,000 across four years to fund The Sir Denis Mahon Archive and Library project at the National Gallery of Ireland, beginning January 2014.
- Provided £10,000 annual funding for a scholarship at Royal Drawing School (formerly the Prince's Drawing School) for the next seven years.

- Essay prize competition established, with a £1,000 prize for the winning essay.

2014/15

- Donations totalling £61,600 to the following recipients:
 - the Art Fund to sponsor the Student Art Pass and to purchase the Van Dyck self-portrait;
 - Gainsborough's House Society;
 - Stonewall; and
 - the University of Oxford to sponsor the illustrations of a Catalogue of Baroque and late Baroque Art published by Dr Catherine Whistler.
- Commitment to providing €60,000 to fund the publication of a revised edition of Salerno's monograph on the Paintings of Guercino, published by Nicholas Turner and Ugo Bozzi Editore.
- Sponsored the inclusion of Guercino's *Death of Lucretia* in the Guercino exhibition in Tokyo at the National Museum of Western Art.

2015/16

- Donations totalling £46,288 to the following recipients:
 - the National Gallery of Ireland for refurbishments of the Mahon Rooms and to purchase a painting by Luke Dillon Mahon;
 - the Diocesi di Novara to support the Baroque Exhibition in Novara in June 2015;
 - the Royal Academy;
 - Gainsborough's House Society.
- Supported the Exhibition of Luke Dillon-Mahon paintings held in February 2015 at the European Commission in London in aid of The British Fund for the National Gallery of Ireland.
- Sponsored the Burne-Jones lecture at the William Morris Gallery in June 2015.

2016/17

- Donations totalling £3,500 to the Art Fund and Gainsborough's House Society.

2017/18

- Donations totalling £3,500 to the Art Fund and Gainsborough's House Society.

- Sponsored a Guercino Lecture attended by senior Guercino scholars and contributed to the restoration of the Guercino masterpiece ceiling and an exhibition in Piacenza, Italy.
- Supported the publication of Massimo Pulini's *Mal'occhio* and Nicholas Turner's *The Paintings of Guercino*.
- Supported the Rimini Drawings Biennale and the exhibition of *Guercino e il suo Falsario* from 28/04 to 15/07/2018

2018/19

- Donations totalling £8,500 to the Art Fund, Gainsborough's House Society and Flat Time House.

2019/20

- Donations totalling £19,500 to the Art Fund, Gainsborough's House Society, Flat Time House and the University of Oxford Development.
- Awarded grant of £10,000 to Yale University towards illustration costs of the title 'Altarpiece in Renaissance Italy' by Professor David Ekserdjian

7 Support

Please consider making a one-off or regular donation to support the work of The Sir Denis Mahon Foundation and its activities. We are a registered charity and all donations, of whatever size, would directly support our educational and exhibition programmes.

Smaller donations can be made directly via [PayPal](#). All donations, small or large, would be greatly appreciated and will make a considerable difference in our mission to continue Sir Denis Mahon's legacy and promote the education and accessibility of art and art history.

If you are a UK tax payer, any donation you make will qualify for tax relief under Gift Aid. For example, if you make a donation of £1,000, The Sir Denis Mahon Foundation would be able to reclaim an extra £250 from the Inland Revenue.

You can also benefit as a higher rate tax payer as if, for example, you donate £1,000, you could be entitled to claim up to £250 from the Inland Revenue, which means that your donation of £1,000 to The Sir Denis Mahon Foundation would only cost you £750.



In the picture: a graphic composition by the artist Leonardo Passeri (born 1982) showing a detail of "Saint Roch giving Alms" by Annibale Carracci (1587-1595) in the collection of the Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister in Dresden, Germany.

You can also support us by co-sponsoring our Events such as the Essay Prize dinner or the cost of the ceremony. You can also co-sponsor our exhibitions, or the catalogues, which would offer great scope for publicising your business or brand.

Finally, please remember to visit our [Shop](#). Any purchase supports our education and exhibition programmes.

For more information, and to donate, please email suzanne.marriott@crsblaw.com

You can also write to Suzanne Marriott at:

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